

**POSITION OF THE DUKE OF  
WELLINGTON. 165**

unseen from the French position, and between the two ridges a valley gave cover to any movement that it might be requisite to make. The flanks were sufficiently protected by the possession of the village of Braine-la-Leude on the right, and La Haye and Ohain on the left, as well as by the forest of Soignies in the rear, upon which both flanks were thrown back.

A careful study of this position will refute the objections of those who have blamed the Duke of Wellington for his choice in occupying it, and who held that, in case of defeat, the position left no means of retreat, and that the English army would, in such circumstances, have been utterly destroyed. It is very difficult to predicate what would happen in certain contingencies, but in the present case there does not appear to be any doubt that under such unfortunate circumstances the British army would have been able to effect a retreat without any extraordinary difficulty. If their first position had been carried, the village of St. Jean in the rear, at the junction of the two great roads before mentioned, would have been an excellent centre of support for a second position, from which it would have been equally difficult to dislodge the British. But even if the British troops had been driven into the forest in a state of rout, they would there have found themselves in comparative safety. The forest consisted of tall trees without underwood, almost everywhere passable for men and horses. In such a position the practicability of maintaining themselves against the French army must be evident to any one who considers the extreme difficulty of forcing infantry from a wood which cannot be turned; and it is confirmed by a remark of the Duke of Wellington, made in conversation with a friend, "They could never have so beaten us but that we could have made good the wood against them."\*

The chief strength of the position of Mont St. Jean was due to two farms in front, — Hougomont and La Haye Sainte.

<sup>1</sup> This I write us to examine a question raised by the battle of Waterloo. Would an army with its back to a forest, and having a good road behind its front and behind each of its wings, be compromised if it lost the battle, as Napoleon has declared? For my part, I believe, on the contrary, such a position would be more favorable for a retreat than ground entirely open" (Jomini, *Précis de l'Art de la Guerre*, tome ii. p. 15).